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Town and Country

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BUSINESS PROGRAM

STANDARDS AND GRADES

To Make Marketing Easier

PURPOSE: To increase an awareness of grading, standards, and inspection as they relate to the marketing of agricultural products.

"As much alike as peas in a pod" is an old adage, but farmers know that even five peas in a pod are not always uniform. In nature, things do not grow exactly alike. Potatoes may be big, little, round, long, perfect, or defective.

And, customers differ in desires and wants almost as do potatoes in a hill. Some customers want only the best and are willing to pay the price; others are willing to sacrifice quality in order to save a penny.

This Key Point is about things produced for sale and ways in which marketing is made easier through the use of grades and standards.

A standard or grade is really a special kind of measurement. Since measurements are extremely important in marketing, let's consider the kinds of measurement that make buying and selling possible.

If you are buying a pound of seed or a gallon of milk, you have some assurance of the quantity of the product you will receive. These are measurements which are recognized anywhere.

There are also standards of measurements of quality which are referred to as "grades." Grade standards of quality are of more recent origin than standards of weights and measures, but they are now considered especially important in marketing. In agricultural products these are known as "grade standards."

Standards of Amount

Let's first consider standards of amount. The pound and the gallon are among the standard measures of volume and weight. In fact, without measure-

ments such as these, there could not be an orderly marketing system. Measurements of amount must be understood and adhered to by both buyers and sellers.

The accurate and scientific measurements used in marketing today represent a slow development from the crude measurements known in the days of Columbus. In those days, the hand, the foot, or grains of wheat actually were used as standards of measurement. Of course, the hand and the foot can vary considerably from man to man and so could many other early measures.

For hundreds of years, governments have played an important role in establishing the measurements authorized for marketing purposes.

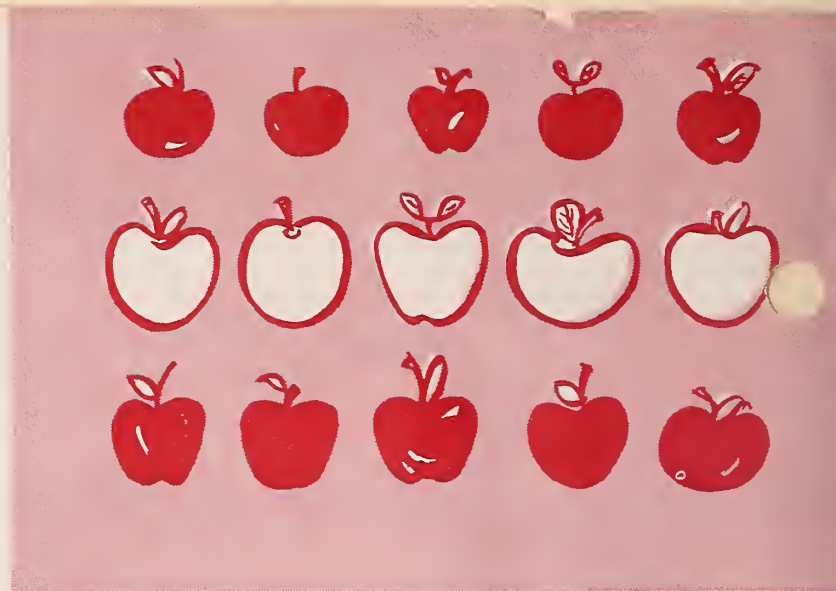
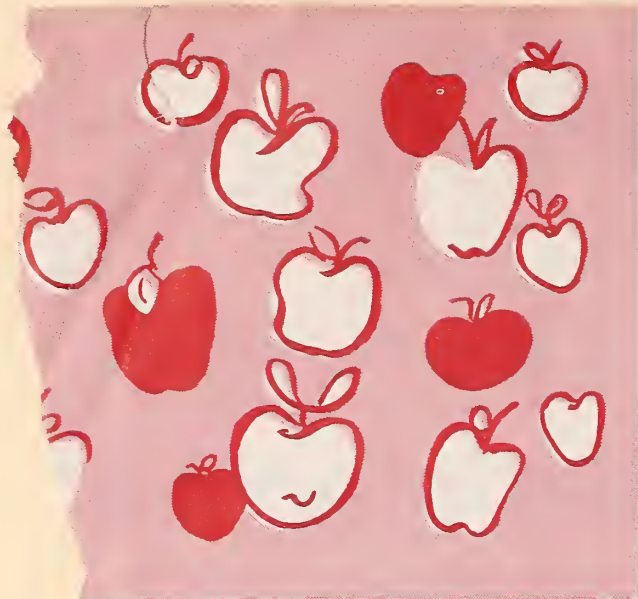
Because the early settlers of this country used standards of weights and measures native to the country from which they came, buying and selling of produce between people and localities was difficult.



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

and State Land-Grant Colleges and Universities Cooperating



Grading involves the sorting of products into groups of similar colors, sizes, shapes and condition.

The Constitution of the United States gave Congress the power to fix weights and measures. Congress has not taken steps to impose uniform standards on States. But as a result of Congressional directives and resolutions in 1832, 1836, 1838, and 1866 fundamental units of length, mass (weight), and capacity and balances were sent to States.

The immediate result of distributing these standards to the States was, in almost all cases, the adoption of the Federal standards as State standards. Thus, through the close cooperative action of State and Federal authorities we have uniform standards of weights and measures. The various State governments have laws that provide a legal basis for confidence in measures used in the market.

Today our government has a National Bureau of Standards which is engaged in the task of helping many groups develop dependable standards of measurement for use throughout the country. These measurements apply to many products of industry and business.

Standards of Quality

But you still have another unknown factor in your purchase — quality. When you specify only in terms of a bushel or a peck, you might receive yellow corn or white corn and it may be top-quality, mediocre, or poor. The apples may be a wide range of sizes and colors. In quality the apples may be on the verge of spoiling or they could be the crispest, juiciest apples you ever tasted.

In today's markets many apples, most grain, and many other products are bought and sold without the buyer ever seeing the commodity until it is delivered to his place of business. The produce handler in Boston can buy cabbage, cauliflower, onions, and tomatoes from a South Texas shipping area, by relying on quality standards to designate the kind of product he wants.

Federal grade standards have been developed as nationally uniform measures of quality for more than 100 foods, including meat, dairy and poultry products, fruits and vegetables, grain and grain products.

The use of official standards for quality, with a few exceptions, is not compulsory.

Grading is done so that a common language can be used to describe the quality of a product. This makes marketing at a distance possible. Grading has become essential in our complex marketing systems. Just as pounds, dozens, and quarts are accepted as measurements of quantity, the terms U. S. Grade A, U. S. Fancy, U. S. Choice, and U. S. No. 1 are accepted as official measurements of quality.

What Is Grading?

We might say simply that grading is "sorting things that grow." In nature and in agriculture things do not all grow exactly alike. Mother Nature seems to like variety. Man is more set in his ways. He seems to like things uniform, so it is customary to do sorting or grading.

When sorting, it is necessary to have some standard for sorting. This standard is really a measurement. A producer must determine the kind of sorting to be done: size, color, both size and color, and shape.

It isn't hard to see that there must be some basis for sorting. Without a standard of some kind, our products would end up almost as mixed as they are before sorting. Grades tell what kind of thing to put in one group and what to put into another.

To be of value, grades must not change. At least they must not change too often. Uniform classes of a product cannot be made if the grader changes his mind or sorts according to any passing whim. Grades must be described in writing. They describe what may or may not go into one group or class.

Grades are a measure of quality. Because of this, U. S. Grades for most farm products have been established. They are the same for all parts of the country and for both buyer and seller.

Sometimes there are different uses for a product. One size, shape, or texture is good for one purpose. A different size, shape, or texture is useful for another

purpose. In these cases it is desirable to sort the product into classes most suitable for the purpose for which they are to be used.

Mixed grades seldom suit anyone. Those desiring high quality may not get what they want. Those seeking the lower grades will not pay for a mixture of high-priced and lower-priced goods, unless the good product in the mixture is included at the lower price.



Grades make it possible to do business at a distance. Nobody likes to buy a "pig in a poke." He wants to see what he is getting. When distances are great, it may not be practical to go look at the product before buying. When there are grades or specifications for the product, the buyer is more willing to buy "sight unseen" and may feel fairly sure that he is getting what he wants.

Grades and grading not only reduce risk for the buyer, but also help the seller. Grades tell him what he has to deliver to satisfy the buyer. They help him to check on the price he should get for a certain quality or kind of product.

Grades and grading help to lower the costs of marketing. The seller need not go to the expense and trouble of shipping a kind or quality that the buyer does not want. The buyer need not spend time and money to hunt what he wants. In this way risk is reduced and costs lowered.

Grades provide the basis for a uniform product. Without uniformity mass distribution would be more costly and perhaps impossible. Grading that is not well done often has to be done over again before the product is finally sold. Poor grading sometimes is little better than none, and often is wasted effort.

Grades help to settle price differences and promote understanding. They help to smooth out differences of opinion that lead to arguments, misunderstandings, and loss of friendship. In a small way they help to promote good will among men. Grades and grading can do these things only when they are used honestly.

Grading Services

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, often in cooperation with State governments, provides grading services for many of the products for which U. S. standards exist. Included are cotton, dairy products, fruit and vegetables (both fresh and processed), grain, hay, straw, meats (beef, veal and calf, lamb and mutton—pork is not now being graded), poultry and eggs, tobacco, and naval stores.

These grading services are offered, for the most part, on a voluntary basis — those wishing to employ them must request them and pay a fee for the service. Products graded under these Government programs may be identified with the official grade mark, usually a shield-shaped mark.

Inspection Services

The U. S. Department of Agriculture also provides inspection services for meat and poultry, which have to do with health and sanitary requirements rather than standardization of quality.

Every consumer has observed the small round purple stamp on large cuts of meat and the round mark on packages of fresh and frozen poultry, and prepared poultry and meat products. These two round marks have great significance. The one which says "U. S. INSP'D and P'S'D" is used on meat and meat products. The other, which says "Inspected for Wholesomeness by U. S. Department of Agriculture," is used on poultry and poultry products. These marks are your assurance that the product which bears them has been inspected and passed as clean, fit, and wholesome food.





All meats and poultry moving in interstate or foreign commerce must be inspected for wholesomeness by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. This is required under Federal law as a measure of consumer protection. Any products which do not measure up to the strict wholesomeness requirements are condemned by Federal inspectors and destroyed for food purposes.

Graduate veterinarians are in charge of inspection in plants where slaughtering of livestock and poultry is done. In addition to six or more years of study in an accredited veterinary college, these veterinarians must pass a civil service examination. They must also demonstrate a keen sense of smell and sight, which are important faculties in this work. After passing the tests, an applicant has to work as an assistant for some time under an experienced man before qualifying to judge the condition of live animals or birds, and dressed carcasses.

Meat and poultry inspectors have the health of the people in their hands. Their thorough, con-

scientious work is responsible for the high degree of public confidence in these Government inspection programs. Today 80 percent of the nation's commercial livestock slaughter and about 85 percent of the poultry sold off farms is inspected for wholesomeness by Federal inspectors.

For fruits and vegetables, like other products, standards have been developed which provide a common language for use by buyers and sellers, enabling them to understand each other as to the quality of a particular lot of produce. An inspection service has been developed to provide, using this common language, a certified official report of the quality of the product. This service is cooperatively maintained by the Federal and State governments, with inspectors conveniently available throughout the marketing channel across the country, from shipping points through processing plants to terminal markets. Largely a voluntary service, it is paid for by the person who employs it, and covers both fresh fruits and vegetables and processed — canned, frozen, and dried.

